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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 000258

SIPDIS

WHA/CCA FOR GZAMBRANO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/15/2019

TAGS: CU ETRD ETTC EZ PREL XG

SUBJECT: CZECH REPUBLIC: REVIEW FOR WAIVER OF TITLE III OF THE LIBERTAD ACT

REF: A. STATE 48487

1B. 08 PRAGUE 762

1C. 08 PRAGUE 320

Classified By: POLEC Counselor Charles O. Blaha for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) The Czech Republic has a strong record of active engagement and support for democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms in Cuba. Former Czech President Vaclav Havel established the Czech government's principled position on Cuba during his administration, following the Czech Republic's own transition from a totalitarian regime in 1989.

All subsequent Czech political leaders have continued this policy of support for the peaceful democratic dissident movement in Cuba and have consistently called for the release of all political prisoners. The Czech Republic referred to the transfer of power between Fidel and Raul Castro as "just a formal confirmation of the status quo" in public statements (Ref C), while calling for Cuba to release all political prisoners, open dialogue with the opposition, and hold a free election. The MFA Department for Human Rights and Transition Policy maintains Cuba as one of its "priority countries," and thus provides financial assistance to Czech NGOs, such as People in Need, which provides humanitarian aid, capacity training and other support for journalists, dissidents and their families.

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Czech Engagement within the EU  
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2.(C) Within the EU, the Czech Republic remains one of our strongest and most vocal allies on human rights issues, particularly with respect to Cuba. In the last year, the Czechs have hosted and attended public events with dissidents from third countries such as Burma and Cuba. Since our last update, the Czechs have assumed the EU Presidency for the first half of 2009. In this role, the Presidency country is expected to walk a fine line between expressing bilateral views and representing the consensus of the 27 EU member states. Within the EU the Czechs have continued to engage other EU member states to keep the pressure on the Cuban regime to implement reforms. Once the Czech EU Presidency concludes June 30, Czech officials have made clear to Cuban dissident groups that they will not be as constrained and that they will resume pressing Cuba, particularly on freedom of expression and religion. Because of their obligations as EU President, the Czechs have met this year with Cuban government officials. On May 11 for the EU-Cuba discussion in Brussels, Czech FM Jan Kohout met with Cuban FM Rodriguez and on May 13-14 Cuban officials attended the EU-Rio Group Foreign Ministerial in Prague. This regular event brings together the 27 EU Foreign Ministers as well as 23 South American and Caribbean Foreign Ministers. Finally it should be noted that the Czechs remain one of the strongest advocates for inviting Cuban dissidents to EU member state

national day festivities. As in past years, the Czechs lead by example and continue to involve Cuban dissidents in their own festivities in Havana.

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No Substantive Czech Trade or Investment  
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¶ 13. (U) The Czech Republic does not have any foreign investments in Cuba. As an EU member state, the government of the Czech Republic (GOCR) does not have any bilateral trade agreements with any country, including Cuba. There are no trade restriction, however, on private companies that want to do business there. According to the Ministry of Industry and Trade (MPO), the Czech Republic exported USD 22.57M worth of goods to Cuba in 2008, while importing goods worth USD 4.58M from Cuba. There are no student exchange programs.

¶ 14. (C) Comment: A waiver of the right to bring an action against entities and nationals of the Czech Republic is necessary to U.S. national interests. The Czech Republic has been at the forefront of efforts to force the Cuban regime to meet international standards of human rights. Our cooperation would definitely be negatively affected if the GOCR were to lose the Title III waiver, especially since it has been one of our best partners on Cuba and certainly the Czechs have one of the highest profiles within the EU on promotion of human rights issues around the world.  
Thompson-Jones